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Editruda Mbegu is a member of the Congregation of Our Lady Queen of Africa in Tanzania. Born and raised in Zimba, a small village near Lake Rukwa, she completed her primary education there. During secondary school, she won an essay competition and received recognition from the U.K. Embassy for her writing. She later earned a diploma and a bachelor's degree in education science from the University of Dar es Salaam and a master's degree in biology of conservation from the University of Nairobi, Kenya. A dedicated teacher and natural conservationist, she works as a teacher, counselor and caretaker.

Although human trafficking occurs everywhere in the world, I will address the issue of trafficking in Sumbawanga-Rukwa, Tanzania, where my community, the Sisters of Our Lady, Queen of Africa, primarily operates.

In Sumbawanga, children under 18 often work as housemaids, cowboys, or in other exploitative roles, transported from rural to urban areas for meager wages. Women, driven by poverty, engage in underpaid farm or domestic work and are sometimes forced into prostitution. By definition this is human trafficking as practiced in our part of the world.

Several factors contribute to the vulnerability of children and women in Sumbawanga, including family breakdown, poverty, school dropouts, inadequate health care, and social discrimination. Boys are often trafficked for forced farm labor and informal work, while girls face early marriages, domestic servitude, and sexual exploitation. Women, affected by widowhood, early marriages, gender-based violence, limited education and opportunities, are similarly at risk. Economic vulnerability and social exclusion make women and children particularly susceptible to traffickers.



Sisters of Our Lady, Queen of Africa, care for vulnerable children at St. Martin de Porres in Sumbawanga, Tanzania. They provide them with parental care, education and a protective environment to reduce their risk of exploitation. (Courtesy of the Congregation of Our Lady, Queen of Africa)

Our community has adopted several strategies to combat trafficking and exploitation.

One is education for sisters. Through seminars and courses, our sisters learn about trafficking to avoid unknowingly engaging in it or enabling it. They are educated on recognizing and preventing trafficking practices, such as underage employment or low-wage exploitation (for example, employing children under 18 years of age, transporting people in poverty from rural to urban areas to work for wealthy people or for relatives at low wages or only for food).



Sr. Anet Pesambili prepares children for their first Communion while educating them about human trafficking. (Courtesy of the Congregation of Our Lady, Queen of Africa)

Another is education for women and children. Sisters working as teachers and catechists educate children about trafficking and empower women to pursue small businesses, farming and livestock rearing. These efforts help women increase their daily earnings.

We also provide support for vulnerable children. Our orphanage centers, St. Martin de Porres in Sumbawanga and St. John Paul II in Mpanda, care for children who are orphaned, abandoned or otherwise vulnerable, such as children with albinism. We provide them with parental care, education and a protective environment to reduce their risk of exploitation.

Many in Sumbawanga remain unaware of the issue of human trafficking, often not knowing they are being trafficked or are trafficking other people. Poverty among women increases the risk of trafficking for themselves and their children. In order to eradicate the issue of human trafficking we have to empower women through education and economic opportunities, enabling them to recognize and escape exploitation.